

## **Corporate Social Responsibility – The Community Sector Perspective Community Sector Forum Report**

On 3 February 2009 the VCOSS Training and Development Clearinghouse held a forum *Corporate Social Responsibility - The Community Sector Perspective*. The forum was hosted by the Australian Institute of Management (AIM) a corporate partner of the Clearinghouse and was attended by 90 representatives from community organisations across Victoria.

Jeffrey Largier and Jeffrey Leong, Oxfam Skill Share volunteers, begun working with VCOSS on a project to understand and document the community sector perspective on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in July 2008.

The project produced two documents, *Corporate Social Responsibility, A Not-For-Profit Perspective: Literature Review* and *Corporate Social Responsibility, A Not-For-Profit Perspective: Interviews with the sector* that were launched at the forum.

Participants were invited to the forum to:

- hear stories of successful CSR engagement;
- explore the contents of the documents and contribute their own perspective; and
- shape the agenda for a forum for corporate organisations interested in engaging more effectively with the community sector. (Scheduled for 3 June 2009)

All participants received a copy of the documents, which include various ideas on engaging effectively with corporate partners and tips on overcoming the common barriers faced by community organisations, prior to the event.

Copies of the report are available from the Clearinghouse.

### **Confirming the Findings**

The morning session included interviews with four of the organisations that participated in the research.

*Emily Wild - Fitted for Work*

*Mandy Burns and Allan Curtain - Ardoch Youth Foundation*

*Peter Brown - Fifteen*

*Graham McKern - MacKillop Family Services*

After hearing from these interviewees and having a chance to ask questions, the audience broke into groups to discuss the report.

Groups highlighted a number of challenges faced by particular types of community organisations that were not addressed in the report, such as:

- How do organisations that are not engaged in direct service work articulate the outcomes/value of their work?
- The difficulties faced by rural, unknown or less attractive organisations in attracting CSR.

- State vs National: Looking at how to manage CSR matches between community organisations and corporate partners were one is state based and the other is national.

There were suggestions for a number of topics that could be explored:

- Relationship management, including monitoring, ending and managing staff turnover.
- The potential of small businesses as CSR partners.
- The Approach – How to get your foot in the door.

Participants identified several useful resources for development, including:

- Clarification around tax status and the benefits for CSR partnerships.
- A guide to workplace giving.
- Codes of Conduct for engaging in CSR.
- Glossary of CSR terms.

The appropriateness of the language used in the report was raised in a number of groups. Participants felt the language wasn't always accessible to the community sector audience and suggested that the language may have the potential to affront corporate organisations.

### **Overcoming the Challenges**

The audience reconvened to hear the report's authors Jeffrey Largier and Jeffrey Leong presented their recommendations to the audience.

There are four recommendations made in the report.

#### ***1. Overcome the expectations gap***

Many organisations would greatly benefit by continuing to build the capacity to market themselves, communicate and reframe their mission and methods to corporates more effectively. This would give them greater ability to attract and enhance their relationships with corporate partners.

#### ***2. Communicate constraints***

The NFP sector as a whole should focus on opening up dialogue with the corporate sector with the view to communicating NFP constraints. It is important for the NFP sector to educate the broader corporate community about the NFP paradigm and investment philosophy as well as organisational and infrastructure constraints. In particular, the NFP sector needs to communicate their needs when it comes to appropriate modes of engagement, so that CSR programs can be structured more effectively for both sides. Whilst this communication and education is currently occurring in an ad hoc fashion, the focus should be on communicating with corporates in a systematic manner; creating a united front. Ad hoc communication prevents NFPs from speaking honestly because they are focused on securing funding and building their corporate relationships.

#### ***3. Expanding opportunities***

The NFP sector would do well to continue to research and explore alternatives to cash funding. By creating alternate modes of engagement, the cash clash can be overcome, and the value provided by CSR could increase.

#### **4. Allowing Access**

The NFP sector could also play a part in expanding access and building opportunities for smaller NFPs that are currently left out of CSR. This could be achieved by building CSR support networks to share information through the NFP sector. Another opportunity that could be explored is to setting up a NFP broker who could reduce the search and administration costs for smaller NFPs who are looking to get involved in corporate-community partnerships. The broker could be a representative body that acts as a facilitator and enabler rather than an organisation that pursues its own interests. Currently, CSR brokers in Australia seem to be either corporate orientated, very specialised or are fee for service, which makes them unaffordable for many NFPs.

The audience again broke in to small groups to discuss these recommendations.

Participants were asked to prioritise the recommendations by voting:

- Almost one third of the votes went to *Recommendation 1. Overcoming the expectations gap*,
- one quarter of the votes went to recommendation 2 and 4,
- and recommendation 3 received the remaining sixth of the votes.

Participants were asked to explore what each recommendation might look like.

##### **1. Overcome the expectations gap**

Participants suggested a workshop for community organisations to:

- learn how to market their organisation
- increase their understanding of corporate requirements
- learn how to “talk” corporate
- to clarify and identify values
- to know your brand and its value

It was suggested that access to pro bono marketing support following the workshop would be helpful as would practical take home worksheets that outline the process of *reframing your mission*.

Participants also wanted assistance in measuring outcomes to communicate return on investment.

##### **2. Communicate constraints**

Further research was suggested, as was workshop to develop a list of constraints. All groups indicated strong support to collaborate as a sector.

##### **3. Expanding opportunities**

Participants suggested further investigation into different models, with recognition that not one size fits all in the community sector, documenting case studies, online support (blogs), training and resources to support community organisations to access non traditional support.

#### **4. Allowing Access**

Participants felt it was important to have a clear picture of who is doing what in the sector in regards to CSR and to pull together and share the collective knowledge. Participants indicated support for further events the February forum, exploring different issues and inviting corporates to sector led CSR events.

#### **Corporate Challenge**

The final presentation for the day was Ms. Susan Heron, Executive Director of Australian Institute of Management Victoria & Tasmania and our host for the day.

Ms. Heron, the only corporate voice for the day set a series of challenges for the community sector.

Ms. Heron outlined that from the corporate perspective there are too many community organisations. In “corporate speak” the community sector needs to consolidate. Ms Heron posed the question “How can an organisation stand out from the crowd, as suggested in the report, when there are so many organisations competing for the same funding?”

“Due to the current economic downturn”, Ms. Heron told the audience, “the corporate sector will have much less money to spend on CSR.”

Ms. Heron reminded the audience that CSR takes significant time and resources on the corporate side – with real costs.

Ms. Heron suggested community organisations need to be more business like in their approach, allocate enough resources internally to engage with the corporate sector effectively and learn to speak the same language.

(Ms. Heron’s presentation is available from the Clearinghouse)

Following the Corporate Challenge presentation, participants were asked to write down their corporate challenge.

Some participants gave suggestions on what the June forum should look like and others gave challenges for the corporate sector more generally.

#### **Suggestions for the forum**

The participants conveyed their invitation to corporate organisations interested in engaging in effective CSR to come along and get to know the community sector. Participants ask corporate participants to step out of their comfort zone, tap into their own personal experience, open their minds and commit to a joint community/corporate follow up event.

Participants suggested the following for the event:

- ensure NFPs terminology is explained
- attendance by not for profits as observers

- invite a diverse range of corporates
- more challenge in the small group discussions
- invite several community sector individuals who can really articulate the community sector experience

### **10 Challenges for the corporate sector**

*(The first three challenges were the most frequently repeated)*

1. **Be open minded about the type of organisation you seek to engage with – small, rural, less attractive, unknown, non service delivery**
2. **Learn about the sector – the needs, the lack of resources, the outcomes, the clients**
3. **Give community sector organisations an opportunity to talk with you.**
4. Be open minded about the types of support you are willing to engage in.
5. Understand the importance of cash contributions and the real costs of CSR programs for community organisations.
6. Understand CSR needs to be a partnership – both sides have something to offer and something to gain.
7. Be clear across your organisation and with the community sector about why you are engaging in CSR and what outcomes you are looking for.
8. Understand you can make a real difference.
9. Share ideas about what is possible.
10. Have a dedicated person to look after CSR.

### **Where to from here?**

The VCOSS Clearinghouse is committed to:

- Facilitate a CSR network to bring together a wide range of key representatives across the state to prioritise, develop and implement the outcomes from both forums.
- Communicate on behalf of the CSR network to the attendees of the forum and the sector more broadly through regular email updates.
- Hold a forum in partnership with Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) on 3 June to present the findings from the report and the February forum to interested corporate organisations.

- Develop a marketing training program inline with *Recommendation 1*

### **What can you do?**

Let's work together as a sector. Your organisation can contribute by:

- Keeping the CSR network informed. Please forward any ideas, issues, good resources, case studies to the Clearinghouse.
- Participating. Attend forums and events, write on blogs, subscribe to the network and take part in research.

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